

Location of the Project: Thailand, Nong Chang

Summer 2022



Team members

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General Information

Contact Person

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Teaching

- Location: Thailand, Uthai Thani, Nong Chang
- Number and age of students: 15 - 30 students per class
- English level: Beginner
- Teaching times: 08:00 – 14:00
- Classroom equipment: White/Black Board, TV, computer, wifi

Accommodation

- Location: 15 minutes apart from the school
- Host family: we had the apartment just for the 4 of us, we stayed with Theow, she is a teacher in a local school
- Facilities: wifi, shared bathroom, washing machine – generally simple but well equipped

Costs of your stay

- Currency: Thai baht
- around CHF 1'000.- for the flight + around CHF 350.- (full-board) for the accommodation
- Transport (to get to the school): by a teacher from the school

Further informations:

- **How to get there/booking a flight:** Book a flight from Zurich to Bangkok and there use the train, bus or private transportation to get to the accommodation
- **Safety:** Walk around in groups; Taxi rather than public transportation, only travel by day
- **Visa:** Not needed for a stay under 30 days
- **What to bring with you:** Mosquit repellent, rain jacket, long pants

Individual Reflection: Julia Trichler

Camille F., Pauline and me arrived on the 26th of July, Camille M. arrived a couple of days later. I highly appreciated the fact that we traveled together – besides practical reasons it's also just a lot more fun. When we arrived at the airport in Bangkok, Theow – the English teacher in whose house we were staying – picked us up from the airport by car. She was immediately very friendly, open and helpful. On our way to the house – the whole trip took us around 3 hours – she already showed us a typical Thai restaurant and ordered typical dishes.

The house we were staying in is located a bit outside of Nong Chang, a small town with supermarkets, various schools and especially several markets. We all stayed in one room, since one of the two rooms did not have an AC. The bathroom and living room were very spacious and comfortable. The house has everything one needs; from wi-fi to shower.

We were all very excited to start teaching. We were split into two groups of two people per school. Camille M. and me were picked up by Teacher Mam from Wat Tung Luang School by car at 8 AM. It took us around 15 minutes to get to the school. I couldn't wait to meet the students. On our first day, the students were still a bit shy, yet very polite and respectful toward us. However, already on our second day at school the students had lost a big amount of their initial shyness and welcomed us with waving hands and big smiles on their faces. They all enjoyed the games we played with them in their breaks very much.

We taught students in the age range of 6 years to 17 years. The general English level was very low, which meant that we sometimes even had difficulties explaining rules of a game we wanted to play with them or of an exercise we wanted them to do. However, teacher Mam helped us translate in Thai as much as she could, which was very helpful. Next to teacher Mam, the teachers' English level was quite low too, which did not prevent them from being kind and generous toward us. We felt very welcome in the school.

We experienced the students as very motivated, hard-working, funny and kind children and young adults and it was an honest pleasure to teach them and play games with them in the breaks. Their generosity was demonstrated inter alia through their frequent gifts to us in the form of their teddy bears or foods they found outside.



We taught from 8:30 to 11:30 and then – after a delicious lunch break (we got cooked food from the school every day) – from 12:30 to 14:30. After school we played with the kids for a while and after they left to go home, we prepared the lessons for the following day. We created card games, created little quizzes, and decided on a general topic of the lesson the following day. After preparing the lesson for the following day, Theow would take one of us to the local market to get food for dinner. It could always just be one of us, since Theow drove with the scooter and there was only place for one person in the back. It was always great fun going to the market with Theow.

During our weekends, which were often prolonged due to bank holidays, we went on short trips such as to Bangkok and Khao Yai National Park. It was very easy to take the bus from Uthai Thani, which is only 30 minutes by car. Theow was more than happy to help as organize a transport to Uthai Thani as she herself did not own a car. We generally felt very safe traveling through Thailand and enjoyed our trips very much. Bangkok is an unbelievably busy city which makes it an experience I will not forget so fast. In addition, Theow showed us around Uthai Thani – her neighbor drove us around town. We all enjoyed the local experience a lot.



Generally, the PIECES Project in Thailand was one of the most enriching, fun and heartwarming experiences I have ever had. I found the students' kindness, openness, curiosity and motivation more than inspirational and would have loved to spend more time with them. We were all very sad to leave them but hope to be able to come back to Thailand soon.

Individual Reflection: Camille Ferry

Julia, my sister Pauline, and I arrived at the Bangkok airport on Tuesday, July 26, 2022. We were welcomed by Theow, the English teacher at Wat Nong Yang School and our host for the stay. We then took the cab directly to Nong Chang. Once we arrived, we discovered the peaceful environment and charming house in which we would be staying for the next four weeks. However, we had learned upon arrival that we would not be teaching until Monday, August 1st, due to a general vacation in Thailand because of the King's birthday. Therefore, we decided to go on an impromptu trip to Bangkok for a few days. Once there, the fourth volunteer Camille Maréchal finally joined us. This short stay allowed us to discover part of this crazy city, but especially to get to know each other better. Real bonds began to be created between the four of us.



My sister Pauline and I decided to team up to teach English at Wat Nong Yang School and Julia and Camille M. at another school. We struggled a bit at the beginning to correctly assess the level of each of the six primary classes. But certainly, we had directly noticed the motivation of the students, and especially their politeness and discipline. They were always very attentive and carefully copied the various lessons. Learning through games was a hit with all the classes.

Combining fun with learning was the key to good assimilation of the vocabulary. Also, they did not hesitate to come to us during the breaks to give us all kinds of candies, stickers, unripe fruits, or warm hugs. I loved watching them all play volleyball together. I loved taking pictures with them. I loved seeing them every morning with their little carton of milk. I loved watching them run to the ice cream shop at the end of class. I loved seeing them full of energy, good humor, and good will towards each other.



For our last day, the entire school organized a ceremony for our departure. I was very moved by the director's speech and the general recognition in our regard. I realized the real growing attachment I had to Wat Nong Yang School. Despite the language barrier, we were able to create unique bonds with the director, teachers, cooks, and children. I never thought I would get so attached to people in such a short period of time, especially considering the limited dialogue. But the mutual respect that we had for each other crossed this language barrier to make our emotions speak instead. Their kindness, caring, and generosity towards us particularly marked and moved me. I am so grateful to have been able to share with them a part of their daily lives. During this quality time, I particularly enjoyed the lunches at the teachers' table, the rides on a motorcycle to the local market, and particularly the breaks spent with the children. Their smiles and laughter will stay with me.



On one of the many cards the students made and gave us before we left, I could read: "I promise that when the teachers come back to Thailand, by then I will be fluent in English". I think the greatest accomplishment I could think of is to inspire all these students to continue to strive to learn English. And when I read this sentence, I could not help but shed a tear (among many others 😊). However, I just regret not being able to fully exploit the initial four weeks planned for teaching due to the numerous vacations in between.

This lifetime experience allowed me to be part of a very enriching cultural exchange. I was able to make encounters that will remain engraved in me. This trip has also brought me two beautiful new friendships and stronger links with my sister. I am grateful to have lived this beautiful chapter of life with the three of them. As I am writing this individual reflection paper, the director of Wat Nong Yang School is feasting in honor of his retirement. I wish him and all the teachers and students health, happiness, and success in their projects. I hope our paths will cross again one day. Thank you



for having welcomed me so well. And also, a huge thank you to Pieces and to the Jan and Oscar Foundation for making this project possible.

Individual reflection: Pauline Ferry

On Tuesday, July 26, 2022, taking off from Switzerland, I must admit that I was a bit nervous. We were landing in a couple of hours, eleven to be precise, in a country I didn't know, sleeping in a stranger's home, speaking a foreign language and that for one month. One month seemed like a long time at this point. Theow, the English teacher who was welcoming us in her home, was the first person we met once arrived in Bangkok. Her large smile and her trying her best to spell my French name dispelled any apprehension.

We discovered our home for the next four weeks after a three-hour taxi drive. A nice house in the middle of the rice fields. The four volunteers we decided to sleep in the same room as it was the only one with climatization. We were not used to the heat and humidity of the tropical country. Sharing the same bedroom and the same life-changing experience, Julia, Camille, my sister and I became very close to each other.

I think I will always remember our first breakfast in Nong Chang. Theow woke up at 6 o'clock to go to the market with her scooter. She brought us some fresh pineapple, some fruit I didn't know of before called rambutan, some pork sticks and sticky rice. The immersion was immediate. I've never tasted a pineapple as tasty and sweet before; I've never eaten some pork stick at eight in the morning. Being able to discover the everyday life of the locals was something I would have never experienced as a classic tourist.



I think back at our teaching experience with a lot of nostalgia. Meeting the children, the teachers, the director are some memories I will forever cherish. The communication was complicated as only the English teacher could understand us. But some feelings transcend language barrier easily. The reciprocal love and gratitude, the kindness and generosity of the children and teachers require no words to be understood. At the beginning of each class, our students greeted us with a warm “Good morning teachers! How are you today?” I think this captures the idea of respect and kindness that was prevalent in Wat Nong Yang School.



Before arriving in Thailand, I had never thought of how hard it would be to leave. I was too anxious about some details going wrong that I forgot to think about the ending. As I said, one month in an unknown environment seemed like a lot to me. But as weeks passed by, I realized how short one month was when you are surrounded by welcoming and kind people. I soon understood that I was getting very attached to the children and that the departure would be highly emotional.

The last day we received tons of cards from our students, a beautiful home-made bag from the director and teachers, who had also organized a farewell dinner party. I promised myself not to cry in front of the children. While reading a card with the children’s photos printed on it and a beautiful hand-written message “Don’t forget us”, I couldn’t resist.



I would like to conclude this individual reflection by thanking PIECES for trusting us to lead the project, the Jan & Oscar Foundation for making the project possible and finally Wat Nong Yang school for making us feel so welcome. As a Thai teacher nicely said “When we have to part, we miss each other. If we have luck, we’ll meet again.”

Individual reflection: Camille Maréchal

1. Theow

During our stay in Nong chang we stayed with Theow, she is a teacher in a local school. She was very nice and always took care of us. We always had way too much food and she always wanted us to try the local dishes. She never complained but was always available when needed.

2. Teacher Mem

I worked in a different school from the one where Theow was. A teacher took care of us for the whole month. She drove us to school and translated some sentences during the lessons as she understood English quite well. She drove us to school and translated some sentences during the lessons as she understood English quite well. She was the nicest person I met during our stay and she always spoiled us with food even if she didn't have to.

3. The school

The school is located outside Nong Chang. It took us ten to fifteen minutes to get there by car. It is surrounded by rice fields. The infrastructure of the school is quite good. They have a ping-pong table, plenty of room to play, televisions in every classroom, and much more. The headmaster was lovely and always tried to communicate with us.

4. The teachers

Apart from teacher Mem, none of the other teachers spoke English well at the school. We tried to communicate with gestures and google translate which worked most of the time and made us laugh a lot. They always looked after the children as if they were their own. The atmosphere was very relaxed and the children really seemed to enjoy going to school.

5. Our mission's purpose

After spending a month in Nong Chang, what I particularly remember about my stay is how warmly the community welcomed me. I learned a lot from the children but I also believe that our work allowed them to see that it is possible, and even fun, to learn English. I think this

project has not only motivated the pupils, but also inspired some of the teachers to become more fluent in the language, which is essential for the children's further learning.

6. Future

For the project to have a real impact, it would be good to focus more on the teachers. Since they don't understand English, it is almost impossible for them to teach it. They just make the pupils learn sentences by heart without understanding anything. This does not allow the children to learn the language effectively and most of the time makes them feel that English is impossible to speak. If teachers had the opportunity to understand how the language is constructed, they would be able to explain it better to children. Our efforts are useful in motivating children but are not sustainable on their own.

7. Experience with PIECES

I have always wanted to do a project with PIECES and I still think it is an excellent initiative but I also have some criticisms. A one month stay in a foreign country like Thailand is not a normal thing for most people and we are out of our comfort zone. I feel that we were not given much information. Sometimes we were given essential information very late, for example the other girls were told they had to do a visa a month before they left and they were stressed about not being able to join us. Also, I would have liked to have had a real information session for us where we could have planned all the little details together. The other groups organised their flights together and had a few meetings that we didn't (I know my flights were different, but we could have adapted them if necessary). I am very grateful to have had the opportunity to participate in this project and I still think that PIECES did a good job.